

THE RENAISSANCE AND CUBIST CONCEPTIONS OF SPACE AND
ART IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH NOVEL:
A STUDY OF THE FORM AND CONTENT OF THE
DESCRIPTIONS OF LANDSCAPE IN *ATALA*,
RENÉ, *ILLUSIONS PERDUES*, *LA CHARTREUSE*
DE PARME, *MADAME BOVARY*, *LE VENTRE*
DE PARIS, AND *A REBOURS*, AND OF
THE FORM AND CONTENT OF THOSE
NOVELS SEEN AS AUTONOMOUS
AESTHETIC PHENOMENA

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Indiana University, 1974

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Chateaubriand, Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, and Zola all develop and utilize in their novels spatial and aesthetic principles which were rudimentarily established during the Renaissance in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century. The structural forms of Atala, René, Illusions Perdues, La Chartreuse de Parme, Madame Bovary, and Le Ventre de Paris, and of the descriptions of landscape contained in those novels--whether external or internal spatial forms--clearly indicate that each of the novelists in question establishes depth in space within the closed geometric spatial system of the Renaissance by means of single viewpoint linear perspective. Those spatial frames are, in varying degrees, endowed with a temporal dimension. Given that spatial framework, each of these novelists studies (1) man, (2) nature, and (3) the transactions between man and the natural world. The most comprehensive representation of the ordinary world of human experience in the novel in the nineteenth century is found in the place novel (Madame Bovary and Le Ventre de Paris)--the consummate expression of the Renaissance conception of space and art in the genre of the novel in the four-hundred-year period that that spatial and aesthetic system was considered a valid basis for the creation of art.

In certain descriptions of landscape in La Chartreuse de Parme and in Madame Bovary, Stendhal and Flaubert, respectively, transcend, whether consciously or unconsciously, the spatial limitations of the closed spatial system of the Renaissance: the former by means of panoramic and telescopic vision, the latter by describing three separate actions simultaneously. La Chartreuse de Parme and Madame Bovary, seen as autonomous aesthetic phenomena, represent a dialectic between the space picture of the Renaissance and that of the modern world.

Unlike Chateaubriand, Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert, and Zola, all of whom adapt the inherited spatial and artistic legacy of the Renaissance to their individual aesthetic needs, Huysmans

rejects the Renaissance conception of space as a valid basis for the creation of art. Huysmans establishes the spatial form of A Rebours and of the landscape descriptions therein by means of multiple viewpoint or simultaneous perspective. Several spatial frames are juxtaposed in a moment of time and refer to each other reflexively. Movement in space is possible without any movement in time. The content of A Rebours and of the descriptions of landscape in that novel demonstrate that the study of the time world of history and the imitation of the appearances of beings and things such as they are perceived by the senses are no longer considered as the purpose of art. During the final decades of the nineteenth century art becomes an essentially cerebral undertaking whose purpose is to explore and determine man's psychic position in the modern world. The spatial and aesthetic principles established by Huysmans in A Rebours represent the basic tenets of the cubist conception of space and art.

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